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EARLY RELATIONS BETWEEN CHRISTIAN MISSIONARIES AND THE BÁBÍ AND BAHÁ'Í COMMUNITIES

by Moojan Momen

Christianity has a long and distinguished history in Iran.[1] Indeed, according to tradition, the three Wise Men who first paid homage to the infant Jesus were Persian Magi. Legend further maintains that such distinguished figures as the Apostles St. Thomas and St. Thaddeus, as well as St. Simon the Zealot, visited and preached in Persia. Although always a minority, the early Christians of Iran demonstrated remarkable vigor: their missionaries penetrated to China where the Sian Fu stone commemorates the furthest East that Christianity reached in the Classical Age. Over the ensuing centuries, however, the fortunes of the Persian Church declined. Cut off from other churches by doctrinal differences and subjected to much persecution, the Nestorian Church (as it came to be known) struggled on, only barely escaping extermination.

By the nineteenth century, the Nestorians were reduced to a small group of about one hundred thousand in northwest Iran. There were also two other groups of Christians in the country: the Armenians, who in 1604 had been evicted from their homelands by Sháh 'Abbás I and forced to settle in various parts of Persia, particularly in Julfa, a suburb of Isfahan; and a smaller number of Georgians who were similarly settled by Sháh 'Abbás I in Julfa and Shiraz in 1614. The Nestorians had faded into insignificance. But the latter two groups still had

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some importance, since they were traders and skilled artisans. Occasionally, one from among them would rise to a position of importance—for example Manúchihr Khán, officially converted to Islam, the Governor of Isfahan who extended his protection to the Báb.

The first Christian missionaries from the West who began work in Persia in an organized manner were from the Roman Catholic Dominican order. These arrived in the fourteenth century, and were followed in the sixteenth century by the Augustinians, and in the seventeenth century by the Carmelites. However, during the second half of the eighteenth century, as a result of the increasing anarchy that followed the death of Nádir Sháh, the various missionary groups withdrew. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, therefore, no Western missionaries were active in Iran.

The first missionary society to establish itself in the middle 1800s was the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM), an interdenominational Protestant body. As a result of some exploratory journeys, a report was forwarded to this Board stating that the Nestorians, who were in many respects similar to Protestants in their beliefs, were in danger of coming under the influence of Catholicism, and that their revival would be "an essential preliminary to the eventual evangelisation of the Muslim population."[2] The first missionaries sent by this Board were the Reverend and Mrs. Justin Perkins. They reached Tabriz in 1834, and one year later settled in Urúmíyyih (now Riḍá'íyyih) in northwest Iran. With the arrival of more missionaries, schools and medical missions were established throughout this area.

Mainly to counter the effects of the Americans among the Nestorians, the French Catholic Lazarists began work in this area in 1841. The man responsible for the resumption of Catholic interest was Eugéne Boré, who was later to become the Superior-General of the Lazarists. The Lazarists based themselves in Khusruvá on the plain of Salmás, while another group started work among the Armenians in Julfa.

Next to begin work in Iran was the London Society for Promoting Christianity among the Jews, known as the Church's

Mission to the Jews (CMJ). This society was first represented in Persia in 1824 and 1830 by the journeys of the intrepid Rev. Joseph Wolff. But a permanent station was not established until Rev. Henry Aaron Stern, Rev. Murray Vicars, and Rev. P. H. Sternschuss were instructed to proceed to Baghdad to establish a base for missionary work among the Jews of Persia and Chaldea. They arrived at Baghdad on 18 October 1844, and over the ensuing years made several journeys through Iran. Later, the principal missionary of this society was Mírzá Núru'lláh, a coverted Persian Jew.

More extensive in influence than the CMJ was another British society, the Church Missionary Society (CMS). This mission became established almost by accident. In the opening years of the nineteenth century Rev. Henry Martyn had a brief but brilliant career as a missionary in Iran. After this, the CMS showed no further interest in the country but allowed one of its missionaries in India, Dr. Robert Bruce, to proceed there in 1869 to improve his Persian. Bruce settled in Julfa, the Christian suburb of Isfahan, and soon found himself involved in the distribution of relief funds raised in London for one of the worst famines to affect Iran during the century. Gradually, Bruce's temporary stay became more and more permanent. In 1875, the CMS officially recognized the Isfahan mission. By the end of the nineteenth century, further stations had been established at Yazd and Kerman. There was an agreement between the Americans and the British to confine their activities to north Persia and south Persia respectively.

From the above summary, it can be seen that a very considerable effort was being exerted in Iran by missionary societies.[3] What then were the results of such labors? Briefly, they were negligible. The reasons for this failure are many: first, as Prof. E. G. Browne has pointed out, since Islam includes a belief in Christ, the results of the missionaries' endeavors to destroy a Muslim's faith in Islam are more often to destroy that person's belief in any religion at all;[4] second, in Islam the formal punishment for apostasy is death; third, the missionaries themselves often were split by disagreements and bickering, while there were continuous efforts by both Catholics and Protestants to

negate each other's efforts; fourth, the missionaries demonstrated such aloofness and condescension toward the Persians that they cut themselves off from the local population; fifth, the missionaries at first confined themselves to the Nestorians and the Armenians, seeking only to convert from one sect of Christianity to another. Even here they were bitterly opposed by the native priesthood who rightly feared an erosion of their influence.

Among the Muslims true conversion was rare. Rather, the missionaries tended to gather around themselves undesirable elements who were often only trying to obtain money or European influence and protection by association with them. Concerning the fruits of the missionary enterprise, Lord Curzon of Keddleston states in his *Persia and the Persian Question*:

> And now, with regard to the practical results of all this excellent, if not always harmonious, enterprise. In my remarks upon the Nestorian Christians I shall show that the missionaries have there performed, and continue to perform, a highly meritorious work. The same may be said of Dr. Bruce's labour among the Armenians at Julfa. But, after all, the temper of mission work is propagandist, and the zealous missionary is ill-satisfied unless he is adding to the fold as well as confirming existing members. If, then, the criterion of missionary enterprise in Persia be the number of converts it has made from Islam, I do not hesitate to say that the prodigious expenditure of money, of honest effort, and of sacrificing toil that has *been showered upon that country has met with a wholly inadequate* return. Young Mohammedans have sometimes been baptised by Christian missionaries. But this must not too readily be confounded with conversion, since the bulk of the newcomers relapse into the faith of their fathers; and I question if, since the day when Henry Martyn set foot in Shiraz up till the present moment, half a dozen Persian Mohammedans have genuinely embraced the Christian creed. I have myself often enquired for, but have never seen, a converted Mussulman (I exclude, of course, those derelicts or orphans of Mussulman parents who are brought up from childhood in Christian schools).[5]

Sir Denis Wright in his book, *The English Amongst the Persians*, has summarized relations between the English missionaries and the local populations:

> The missionaries were a motley group—some educated, others hardly at all: some broad-minded and tolerant, others as bigoted and narrow-minded as the most fanatic Moslem. . . . Socially they tended to keep much to themselves and to regard Persians and Armenians more as children to be pitied and helped than as equals. They were, perhaps, doing no more than reflect the spirit of an age which believed in the white man's burden and superiority, but it was an attitude which had no appeal to the Persians, who were inclined to regard the missionaries either with intense hostility as interfering infidels or else with tolerance as harmless, well-meaning curiosities from another continent.[6]

The same situation existed with regard to American missionaries. Madame Ida Pfeiffer, a Viennese lady who visited the Urúmíyyih mission in 1848 (at a time when the Báb was imprisoned a short distance away at Chihríq), records:

> The house of the missionary society is most charmingly situated. . . . The house itself is large, and furnished with every possible convenience, so that I thought I was in the country-house of wealthy private people, and not under the roof of simple disciples of Christ. . . . I [had] thought that they were so absorbed with zeal and the desire to convert the heathen, that, like the disciples of Christ, quite forgetting their comforts and necessaries, they dwelt with them under one roof, and ate from one dish, &c. Alas! these were pictures and representations which I had gathered out of books; in reality the case was very different. They lead the same kind of life as the wealthy: they have handsome dwellings, which are fitted up with luxurious furniture, and every convenience. They recline upon easy divans, while their wives preside at tea-table, and the children attack the cakes and sweetmeats heartily; indeed their position is pleasanter and freer from care than that of most people; their occupation is not very laborious, and their income certain, whatever may be the conditons of their country.
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> I do not think that it can be easy to gain the confidence of the natives in this way. Their foreign dress, and elegant mode of life, make the people feel too strongly the difference of rank, and inspire them with fear and reserve rather than confidence and love. . . .
>
> I have made the minutest inquiries in all places respecting the results of missions, and have always heard that a baptism is one of the greatest rarities. . . .

> I hope that my views may not be misunderstood; I have great respect for missionaries, and all whom I have known were honorable men . . . everywhere they showed me the greatest kindness and attention.[7]

EARLY CONTACTS WITH BÁBÍS

During the period of the tumultuous events associated with the ministry of the Báb, only three missionary groups were active in Persia: the Americans, the French Lazarists—both in the Urúmíyyih area—and the CMJ missionaries, who undertook several journeys through Persia from their base in Baghdad.

In December 1845, CMJ missionaries Stern and Sternschuss set out from Baghdad on one such journey. On 12 January 1846 they arrived at Shiraz and were there at the same time as the Báb.[8] They were received on 20 January by Ḥusayn Khán, the governor and one of the first persons to oppose the Báb in Persia.

From Shiraz the two missionaries proceeded to Isfahan, where they met its famous governor, Manúchihr Khán, Mu'tamadu'd-Dawlih on 6 March 1846. Unlike Layard, who met Manúchihr Khán as the antagonist of his friend Muḥammad-Taqí Khán, the Bakhtíyárí leader,[9] the two missionaries were greatly impressed. Stern wrote of the governor, praising both his personal and administrative abilities: ". . . one of the greatest men and best rulers in Persia."[10] Following this interview, Manúchihr Khán arranged a debate between the missionaries and the leading rabbis of Isfahan.

Much encouraged by the settled conditions in Isfahan and the enlightened attitude of its governor, the two missionaries, on their return to Baghdad, forwarded a recommendation to the CMJ that their headquarters be moved to Isfahan. The Central Committee of the CMJ concurred, and early in 1847 the two set out for the city once more. They arrived in Isfahan on 18 February: thus they were also in Isfahan contemporaneously with the Báb.

Their second visit to Isfahan was not such a happy affair, however:

> Near Ispahan we noticed many symptoms of ominous import, the peasants were loud in their complaints against the government, and high language was used against the collectors of taxes and other imposts; the road, too, was reported unsafe, and sad tales of theft and plunder circulated amongst the idle rustics. To the questions which we put to those whom we met, the laconic reply was, "the Mehtummed is ill." At the gates of the town the excitement was prodigious; one declared, the governor was dead, another swore that he was not sick at all, whilst a third averred that it was only a trick to ensnare the disaffected and rebellious.[11]

Sternschuss wrote to the CMJ on 24 February 1847:

> It is our painful duty to inform you of the loss we have sustained in the death of Mehommed-i-Dowleh, Governor of Ispahan; he had been very kind to us on our first visit to this place, and we have sufficient cause to regret him as our friend and patron, although he was a Moslem. His death was occasioned by a severe cold. On Sunday last, the 21st instant, in the evening, he expired. He was Governor for nine years, during which time Ispahan enjoyed a tranquillity the like of which the present generation do not remember. . . . The principal part of the population of this place, consist of a notoriously bad set of people; but, by his wise and energetic administration of justice, he subdued their ferocity.[12]

The death of the Bábí governor, Manúchihr Khán, was also a turning point in the life of the Báb, marking the termination of the last period of comparative freedom and calm that he was to know. Isfahan itself errupted into anarchy. Stern wrote:

> The savage passions of these desperadoes, which, during the Mehtummed's rule, had been forcibly suppressed by the glittering knife of the executioners, like an irresistible torrent, broke forth and spread terror and confusion through every quarter of this extensive town. . . .
>
> Ispahan continued to be the theatre of the most detestable passions, and most sanguinary conflicts; the zootees [lúṭís?], the licensed robbers and assassins of Persia, daily, without reflection or remorse, perpetrated every imaginable and repulsive crime with impugnity. Meerza Gourgeen Khan, who had succeeded the

> Mehtummed in the government, instead of stemming the torrent of corruption and vice, which overpowered the town, and tainted the very atmosphere with a moral poison, by his licentiousness and profligacy sanctioned and countenanced the proceedings of these dreaded banditti and abandoned ruffians.[13]

Stern also recorded one of the earliest meetings between missionaries and followers of the Báb. This account of his meeting with some Bábís in Barfurúsh (now Bábul) on 12 April 1852 demonstrates clearly the spirit of bitterness and animosity that prevailed among some Bábís and led, a few months later, to the attempt on the life of the shah:

> In returning to my lodging, I met a good number of Mahomedans, who inquired whether I had any tracts against their Prophet. Upon my asking why they wanted such pamphlets, they replied with great caution, (for I saw them gazing in all directions to see whether any of "the faithful" were near,) "Because we detest Mahomed, and ridicule his Koran." During the short conversation which I had with them in the street, I learnt they were secret followers of Baba, the renowned Persian socialist, whose community two years ago menaced both the religion and throne of Persia. The founder of this sect, and thousands of his adherents, died an ignominious death; but, notwithstanding all the rigour which has been applied in order to extirpate this heresy, there are still many thousands of the rich and learned in Mazanderan, and other provinces, who venerate Baba, and regard his violent death as a national calamity. I informed my acquaintances in the street, that I should be happy to see them in the caravanserai, but they were afraid to meet me, for fear of exciting suspicion. One of them, who from his white turban appeared to be a mullah, said, "Inshallah," (i.e., please God,) "we shall yet drive Mahomed, Ali, and all the Imams from Persia; and whether we become Ingleese, or Russ, (meaning Christians of either Churches,) is to us a matter of indifference, since all creeds are better than that of the Arabian robber." I was glad to get out of their company, for although they appeared to belong to the aristocracy of the place, still their language was too violent, and their opposition and hatred to the Prophet of Mecca to bitter, for any lengthened conversation in the public throughfare.[14]

The American missionaries around Urúmíyyih took close interest in the episode of the Báb, being situated near to his place of confinement at Chihríq. One of them, Dr. Austin Wright, wrote an account of the Báb which he sent to the American Oriental Society.[15] His colleague, Perkins, the founder of the Urúmíyyih mission, translated Wright's article and sent it to the *Deutsche Morganlandische Gesellschaft*, which published it in its *Zeitschrift*.[16] This was the first account of the Bábí movement to appear in a learned journal.

The Báb was brought to Urúmíyyih in mid-1848, on the way from Chihríq to Tabriz to attend his trial. The Bábí and Bahá'í histories record the Báb's stay in Urúmíyyih as having been a momentous affair. The accounts of the American missionaries confirm this. Wright stated: "On the way to Tabriz the Bab was brought Urmiyyih, where the Governor treated him with special consideration, and many people received permission to see him. On one occasion, there was a large crowd of people with him, and as the Governor remarked afterwards, they were all agitated inwardly and broke out in tears."[17]

The other group of missionaries working in the same area as the Americans were the French Lazarists. The latter were based even closer to Chihríq than were the Americans. An examination of their archives, however, has failed to reveal any mention of the Báb.[18]

BRUCE AND THE BÁBÍS

Although Rev. Robert Bruce officially traveled to Julfa in 1869 only to improve his Persian, his missionary zeal quickly got the better of him, and he began preaching to the populace. But he was insufficiently experienced in the wiles of the local population and was soon being duped by a number of persons, and among them a group of Bábís. The story of how these Bábís came to be baptized begins in Istanbul.

On 11 April 1870 Rev. S. W. Koelle of the CMS, while working in Istanbul, reported coming into contact with a Persian, Mírzá 'Abdu'l-Kháliq.[19] In this and subsequent letters, Koelle

gives us the following information concerning this man and his friend, Mullá 'Alí:

1. Mírzá 'Abdu'l-Kháliq was about twenty-six years of age, of a good family of Isfahan. He was for some years *kátib* (secretary) to the late Crown Prince (presumably Mu'ínu'd-Dín Mírzá, d. 1856) in Tabriz. While returning home the previous year (1869), he had met Mullá 'Alí, a distant relative, in Ṭihrán and had come under the instruction of a French Jesuit. He had accompanied Mullá 'Alí to Istanbul. After disillusionment with the Catholics, he had been in the process of obtaining employment at the Persian Legation when he had entered into conversation with a Nestorian who had led him to Koelle.

2. Mullá Muḥammad-'Alí, known as Mullá 'Alí, was aged forty, of a family of Isfahan whose trade was making braidings of silk, gold, and silver. He had studied at a religious college (presumably a *madrisih*) for several years but had been dissatisfied with what he had learned from the ulama and so "began to visit the Jews and the Babis." Eventually, he met an Armenian Catholic priest who sent him to the French Jesuit in Ṭihrán from whom he and Mírzá 'Abdu'l-Kháliq took instruction. When Mullá 'Alí decided to become a Christian, he was sent to the Patriarch in Istanbul with letters of recommendation and the suggestion that he be sent to the College of Propaganda in Rome. On his arrival at Istanbul, the Patriarch was absent. He became disillusioned with the Catholics there, and had in fact left for Egypt when Mírzá 'Abdu'l-Kháliq's letter reached him informing him of the latter's contacts with Koelle—whereupon he returned.[20]

After several adventures, including arrest by the Persian Legation, both Mírzá 'Abdu'l-Kháliq and Mullá 'Alí were baptized in early 1871. In none of Koelle's letters is it specifically stated that either of these two was a Bábí. That would seem probable, however, from what followed.

In a letter dated 3 April 1871, Bruce, writing from Julfa, informed the CMS of the baptism of "Syad Hashim, one of the former leaders of the Babies in this neighbourhood."[21] Siyyid Háshim had been urged to contact Bruce by his friend Mullá 'Alí. There followed a flood of conversions of Bábís. These were: (a) Siyyid Háshim (renamed after conversion Náṣir), the

friend and "Baaby teacher of Mulla Ally of Constantinople"—by trade a perfumer, of great fame among the Bábís; (b) His brother, two sons, wife and four daughters; (c) Ḥasan and Muḥammad-Riḍá (renamed Joseph and Jacob respectively), brothers of Mullá 'Alí of Istanbul—manufacturers of silk fringes; (d) Their sister, "Razieh" and her two children; (e) The wife of Ḥasan, "Zuhara," his son, Isaac, and daughter, Sharífa; (f) Siyyid Áqá Yaḥyá (renamed John), a disciple of Siyyid Háshim—also a silk fringe merchant with a large family; (g) Three "brethren" from a distant village, "All apparently of the most earnest Eastern Christians I ever saw": Mullá Ismá'íl—a good Arabic scholar, a dyer by trade, Yaḥyá—his partner, and Sulaymán—a laborer; (h) The wife of Yaḥyá; (i) Ṣádiq and Raḥmatu'lláh—both cloth merchants; (j) Núru'lláh, son of Ṣádiq (the last three being disciples of Siyyid Áqá Yaḥyá.); (k) Ustád Mihdí and Ustád Qásim—both builders.[22]

Bruce's enthusiasm for the new converts was boundless. In September 1871 he wrote:

> If I was asked what is the distinguishing characteristic of the converts compared with other Persians & compared with Indian native Christians, I should say contrasted with the former, they would strike anyone as wonderfully straightforward, truthful and truth-seeking. Compared with Indian native Christians, I should say they are more truthful. This may arise from their having less Christian teaching. Poor people, they certainly are brought up in a religious hotbed. The fact that many tens of thousands of Persians suffered the most cruel martyrdom for what they believed to be the truth as followers of Baab during the present century proves that the Persians are not hardened infidels.[23]

Great plans were made: in June 1871 Bruce wrote that Siyyid Háshim, one of the brothers of Mullá 'Alí and the "three brethren dyers" proposed to undertake a tour "through all the chief towns of the Baabys as far as Tabreez."[24] Bruce further wrote:

> I have the greatest hope that it will ere long appear that Baab's mission was a forerunner of the Gospel in this land. . . . It is quite wonderful the opening I would have here now had we freedom. . . .

> I am trying to write a paper on Baabyism. 400 of the most learned men of Persia were put to death for following him—it would be impossible to say how many of the poorer—or how many followers he still has—in all parts of Persia. He was put to death himself—& his system is a failure—but all his followers are not only freed from the delusions of Sheeism, but filled with hatred of it, and Baab's teaching is borrowed largely from the Gospel.[25]

And one month later: "Baabyism—which has no foundation except hatred of priests is rapidly spreading & must end in rebellion unless it is put out by liberty."[26]

Bruce's naive enthusiasm was doomed to disappointment; even his missionary colleagues expressed their doubts about the wisdom of the course that he was pursuing, or at least the rapidity of it. By July 1873 Bruce's initial optimism had become considerably modified:

> Some few of those who appeared to be my most active and earnest adherents and helpers during the famine have since partly fallen back. . . .
>
> Indeed those who I thought at first had no interested motives, and whom I felt most inclined to trust have in some cases disappointed me most.[27]

Writing of the results of his missionary endeavors in September 1874, Bruce confesses the loss of almost all his Bábí converts. Siyyid Háshim "never comes to our services" and is "unsatisfactory." Of the two brothers of Mullá 'Alí, one had left and the other was unsatisfactory. The men from "a village 10 miles distant. . . come occasionally." Only Núru'lláh, Ṣádiq, and Siyyid Áqá Yaḥyá were attending regularly.

In Istanbul, the story was not different. Mírzá 'Abdu'l-Kháliq had gone to Persia in the service of a Persian prince and was not heard of again.[29] Mullá 'Alí, who had been taken on by Koelle as a native missionary in 1871,[30] married a Muslim woman in a Muslim ceremony in front of the Turkish authorities in 1876. His action caused Koelle considerable embarrassment and he was dismissed forthwith.[31]

No Bábí or Bahá'í history mentions these conversions to Christianity in Isfahan. However, the identity of one of these

Bábís can be confidently established, and some of the others more tentatively. The first of the three brethren from a village ten miles from Isfahan, who is described as a dyer with a good knowledge of Arabic, can be none other than Mullá Ismá'íl-i Sabbágh, the Azalí scribe who in later years provided Prof. E. G. Browne with many of his manuscripts. Browne initially knew him only as Mírzá Muṣtafá. But in one of the last communications that he received from him, Mírzá Muṣtafá states that his real name is Ismá'íl-i Sabbágh, and that his is from Sidih, a village near Isfahan.[32] The man who acted as intermediary between Ismá'íl-i Sabbágh and Browne was Dr. Sa'íd Khán of Kurdistan. In one of the letters of the latter to Browne, there is further confirmation of the fact that Ismá'íl, the Azalí scribe, is the same as the Ismá'íl converted by Bruce forty years previously. Dr. Sa'íd Khán writes: "Sorry to say M[uṣtafá], though a Bábí, yet pretended conversion to Xity [Christianity], and was baptized by Dr. Bruce, before he went to Cyprus."[33]

The identity of the other converts is less certain. Mírzá 'Abdu'l-Kháliq, who was converted in Istanbul, may be identical to the Mírzá 'Abdu'l-Kháliq who in later years worked in the Iranian embassy at Istanbul and acted as an intermediary between Mírzá Hádíy-i Dawlatábádí in Iran and Mírzá Yaḥyá, Ṣubḥ-i Azal, in Cyprus.[34]

The next question concerns the motive for these conversions, which were evidently not sincere. One clue is found in the comment of Bruce previously quoted: "Some few of those who appeared to be my most active and earnest adherents and helpers during the famine have since partly fallen back." In 1871, when the conversions occured, Persia was in the grip of the most severe famine to have affected it in many generations. Isfahan was one of the worst-affected places, and the situation there was aggravated by the fact that the leading ulama were hoarding grain. Julfa, the Armenian suburb, was, by contrast, well provided for. Armenians in India and other places sent them large sums of money as famine relief. Bruce had been made responsible for the distribution of sums of money collected in London in response to an appeal by Sir Henry Rawlinson and others. Thus at a time when thousands were dying of starvation, it is not surprising that a few individuals should

have been willing to come to Bruce and express an interest in Christianity, even though Bruce, in his earlier reports, denies this being their motive.

Although this episode is not of any importance in itself, it is of great help in shedding light on the state of the Bábí community in what can perhaps be termed the Dark Age of Bábí history. There is a period from 1852 until 1875, for which there is a great dearth of source materials that shed light on what was happening to the Bábí movement in Iran during a crucial phase of its development, when it was being gradually transformed into the Bahá'í community. Bruce's reports demonstrate clearly a great deal of fragmentation. In April 1874, at the same time as Bruce was reporting the first of this series of conversions, he also mentioned that he had received inquiries from "a very respectable man and his son—the father is a Babi also but of a sect of that persuasion who are not on friendly terms with Syad Hashim."[35] In 1874, when Bruce came into contact with Bahá'ís, he was careful to identify them as a separate sect of Bábís from those he had encountered a few years before.[36]

There is no doubt that the upheavals of 1850 and the holocaust following the attempt on the life of the shah crushed the Bábís and transformed them into an underground movement. There is also ample evidence of the fragmentation of the Bábí community in the period immediately following 1852. Thus, for example (apart from the best known schism—that between Bahá'u'lláh and Ṣubḥ-i Azal), there were also other groups such as the Dayyánís, followers of Mírzá Asadu'lláhy-i Dayyán, in Azerbaijan and Gílán. But it would seem probable that a large proportion of Bábís existed in small, separate, unaffiliated groups—not because of doctrinal differences, but because fierce persecution had disrupted communications between believers, and it was not possible to reestablish these under the conditions of secrecy and mistrust under which the Bábís were forced to live.

Thus I would propose that the Bábí community in the period after 1853 consisted of small, isolated groups of Bábís. The members of these groups would have been in contact with each other, but not with other groups of Bábís, and may even have been antagonistic to other nearby groups because of doctrinal

differences. Most of these groups were probably centered around the personality of individual local leaders. This would have contributed to their isolation. In this atmosphere of defeat and demoralization, we can be sure that many of these local leaders laid claim to the station of "Him whom God will make manifest"[37] in an effort to revive the dying community. 'Abdu'l-Bahá states that some twenty-five persons made such a claim.[38]

Bruce's reports confirm most of these conjectures. The group of Bábís with whom Bruce came into contact seem to have been under the leadership of Siyyid Háshim and were all known to each other but isolated from, and antagonistic to, other groups of Bábís in the Isfahan area. Although at least one of them became an Azalí (the one whose identity is certain, Mullá Ismá'íl-i Sabbágh), this was not until some twenty years later in Ṭihrán. Moreover, Bruce's reports show that this state of affairs persisted as late as the 1870s.

From 1868 onwards, Bahá'u'lláh's emissaries, such as Nabíl-i A'ẓam and Mírzá Aḥmad of Yazd, were traveling throughout Persia contacting isolated groups of Bábís. Most of these became incorporated into the Bahá'í community. A few, at this time, became firmly committed to Azal, and these groups came under the leadership of Mírzá Hádíy-i Dawlatábádí. A very small and decreasing number remained unaffiliated and became known as Kullu-Shay'ís. But it is doubtful that this last group was organized to any extent.[39]

THE CMS AND THE BAHÁ'ÍS

Shortly after Bruce's unfortunate contact with the Bábís, he came into contact with the Bahá'ís of Isfahan. In 1874, there erupted a persecution of the Bahá'í community by Shaykh Muḥammad-Báqir (known as the Wolf).[40] In a letter of 19 November 1894, Bruce reported:

> I am just now reading the latest *Bible* of the Baabis. The sect of Baabis which is now increasing in Persia is that called the Bahai. Their chief is in prison in Acca—he calls himself *The Father* and says Báb bore to him the same relation as John the Baptist did "*The*

> *Son*." His book is a collection of Divine revelations ? addressed to "The Pope," "*The Queen* of London," "The King of Paris" and other crowned heads. In all his letters to Christians he never alludes to Mahomed but freely quotes the N.T. and says his appearance is the fulfillment of the promise of the Son that he would return. But that he has returned in the person of the Father. He says to the Pope: You dwell in (Kasiry which means in Arabic both sin and) palaces and I the greatest Manifestation of the Diety dwell in the meanest of hovels (the prison). My body is imprisoned to give you freedom, it has submitted to dishonour to bring you honour. Remember how the Pharisees turned away from the Son. Take care that you do not thus turn from The Father. Oh ye monks ye array yourselves in gorgeous robes and forget that the robe of God is red with the blood of enemies." I had a great many Baabis with me yesterday including some of those who were imprisoned and whom I had got set at liberty. I said to them—You allow that Christ is the Son, The Word, The Spirit of God, even God himself and you say Baha is the Father. What is Mahomed then? Oh they said we have nothing to say to Mahomed. I said yes but you have for both Bab and Baha arose out of Islam as Christ did out of Judaism. If Moses is false so is Christ and if Mahomad is false Bab and Baha are false also. They would give no answer to this but would talk forever of Christ and Baha. I can not but believe that when these poor deluded people find out—as surely they must—that Baha is not God the Father they will be ready to receive Christ. For they are quite alienated from Mahomed.[41]

This letter marked the beginning of a period of close relations between CMS missionaries and Bahá'ís that was to last until the turn of the century. A major problem missionaries faced in trying to approach Persian Shí'í Muslims was the fact that orthodox Shí'ís regarded Christians as unclean—the slightest contact defiling everything they touched—and, therefore, avoided every from of association with them. Those Shí'ís who would have anything to do with them were often undesirable elements trying to obtain money. Moreover, it was a standard part of Muslim anti-Christian polemic to maintain that the Christians do not have the real Gospel, but only a perverted version. Therefore, to Muslims the missionaries' Bible held no authority. Thus it was that initially all missionary groups concentrated on

Christian communities such as the Armenians. For Bruce, it was an encouraging change to meet the Báhá'ís. Here was a group of respectable Persians of Muslim background with whom he could freely meet and speak, and who accepted the Bible as a Holy Book. Small wonder then that, initially, the missionaries wrote enthusiastic reports of their hopes that the Bahá'í Faith would constitute a stepping-stone between Islam and Christianity in the work of evangelizing the East.

On 28 December 1877 Bruce wrote in his annual letter:

> In another town I had an interesting night with some Baabys. We cannot but hope that this sect, who believe that Jesus Christ is returned in the person of the Father and is now in prison at Acca in Palestine, will in time be open to the gospel. They hate Moslems and love Christians. They freely allow that all their best tenets are taken from the New Testament and not from the Koran. They do not allow polygamy and believe in the incarnation and divinity of Jesus Christ.[42]

Similar sentiments were expressed by the missionaries over the ensuing years. In July 1893, the *Church Missionary Intelligencer* printed an article by Rev. C. H. Stileman entitled "A Week with the Bâbîs," which recounted his visit to Najafábád. The editor of the *Intelligencer* wrote: "The knowledge of Christ possessed by this people is indeed remarkable. Here is an inviting field for the Christian missionary! It will be observed that the particular sect visited by Mr. Stileman is called *Behái* apparently a branch of the Babis, who believe that Christ came the second time fifty years ago in the person of their founder Behá."[43] At Najafábád, the missionaries rented premises from a Bahá'í for many years, and there were friendly relations between the two groups.

Even as late as 1898, another CMS missionary, Bishop Edward Stuart, was able to write, concerning his visit to Kashan:

> Here, as in other places which we have visited,[44] we found that the Babi element renders the people more accessible, and even desirous of intercourse with Christians; ready to converse on

> religious topics, and eager to obtain copies of our Scriptures, with which they have already some acquaintance. Not infrequently when we visited the house of Babis. . . the Bible or New Testament would be produced. . . . The books bore signs of having been read, and had various passages marked.[45]

Another factor which drew Bahá'ís and missionaries together was the fact that the missionaries were sometimes accused of spreading Babism. In 1876, Bruce wrote:

> I am sorry to inform Your Eminence that the R.C. [Roman Catholic] priest is still doing his utmost to stir up the Mahomedans against us. Some months ago he had a long 'istishahad' [testamentary statement] written to the Shah against us. Not a week passes for months that he has not been to the Sheikhs, and other Mullahs more than once telling them that the English religion is the same as the Baaby, that the Protestants are Baabys.[46]

In 1887 Mr. Benjamin Badall, colporteur of the British and Foreign Bible Society (affiliated with the CMS) reported:

> Yezd:—This is the third time that we have visited this town, and the work increases steadily; and, as far as we can understand, the reason of this is that the religion of Baha (i.e. Baabism) increases daily, and one of them said that since our last visit more than four hundred men have become Baabis in Yezd alone, besides those in the surrounding villages. Our work in this town was quite different from that in Kerman, either on our first or second visit, yet in Yezd we were opposed twice, viz. on the first and last visits, both by the Mullas and the Governor, because they thought that the [Bábí religion] was introduced in the place by our books. . . .
>
> One day, whilst I was walking in the bazaars, hundreds of men crowded about me and began to discuss with me, because they thought that I was propagating the religion of Baha, and the more strongly I denied the statement . . . the more they shouted.[47]

Four years later, Mr. John Preece, the British Consul in Isfahan, reported in a dispatch dated 6 January 1891 that the notorious firebrand Áqá Najafí was accusing Mírzá Núru'lláh,

missionary of the CMJ, of being a Bábí, saying of a school opened by Mírzá Núru'lláh that "he wishes to make them all Babis."[48]

The third factor which brought Bahá'ís and missionaries together was that missionaries frequently protected Bahá'ís during the periodic persecutions to which they were subject. In 1874, when Shaykh Muḥammad-Báqir stirred up the populace against the Bahá'ís, Bruce wrote urgently to the British minister in Ṭihrán, Mr. W. Taylour Thomson.[49] In 1879, when the King of the Martyrs and Beloved of the Martyrs were in prison, prior to their martyrdom, Bruce intervened on their behalf with the Governor, Zillu's-Sulṭán.[50] Even more courageous was the action of Mírzá Núru'lláh, the missionary to the Jews mentioned above. In 1889 a number of unfortunate Bahá'ís were driven from their village of Sidih at the instigation of Áqá Najafí. They wandered between Isfahan and Ṭihrán for a year trying to obtain justice. Eventually, seven of them were brutally murdered as they returned to their village with a *firman* from the shah guaranteeing their safety. The survivors of this episode fled back to Isfahan where they found shelter at the house of Mírzá Núru'lláh. Bruce wrote: "He took twenty-five Babis into his house, and kept them for days. This was a most brave act, as it really endangered his own life, especially as he is a Persian subject."[51]

During the Yazd upheaval of 1903, the CMS missionaries, Dr. Henry White, Rev. Napier Malcolm, and others protected several Bahá'ís for a period, although toward the end of the persecutions, on the instructions of the British consular representative, they turned the Bahá'ís out. The British embassy had informed them that it could not be held responsible for their safety should they continue to shelter Bahá'ís.[52]

As a further aspect of the relationship between missionaries and Bahá'ís, it is worth mentioning the following telegram that Mr. Bax Ironside, who was on special mission in Isfahan, sent to Sir Henry Drummond Wolff, the British minister, shortly after the murder of seven Bahá'ís of Sidih. He had found the missionaries sheltering Bahá'ís:

> Missionarys [*sic*] are busily engaged trying to convert supposed Babys. These latter find themselves on the horns of a dilemna and thus may possibly become proselytes. . . . I consider it of importance to secure shelter for these people away from the influence of missionaries . . . it would be most inconvenient if these villagers were converted to Christianity now. P. [i.e., Persian] Government would undoubtedly think that we had a hand in it and were not acting solely from humanising motives.[53]

The records of the CMS confirm that the missionaries were trying to convert the Bábís at this time with some success, although it is not clear to what extent these conversions, which occurred at a time of considerable duress, were genuine and lasting. A few years later, a group of five missionaries signed a letter which indicated a similar line of thought: "The great Babi movement has alienated vast numbers of the people from Islam & their severe persecution by the Muslems renders them at present peculiarly accessible to Christian teaching & influence."[54]

TURN OF THE TIDE

Although we have indicated several factors that drew the Bahá'ís and missionaries together, the primary function of the missionaries was, of course, to obtain converts to Christianity. Their first interest in the Bahá'ís was as a potential source of new Christians. Thus, as it slowly dawned on them that the Bahá'ís would not be a rich source of converts, and indeed threatened to be their greatest rivals in the field of conversions, it is not surprising that their initial enthusiasm was modified and eventually turned into outright hostility.

The first to express doubts about the Bahá'ís becoming a fruitful field of missionary endeavor was Rev. Henry Carless. After a two and a half month tour of Yazd, he wrote in July 1890:

> The Babis are very numerous in Yezd. . . . I did not find much encouragement amongst this sect in a spiritual sense, they received me kindly—many of them came to see me & engaged in lengthy arguments, in order to make me a Babi. They contend that Christ

has already come a second time in this present man, Beha, living in Acre—the same Spirit of God incarnate in all the prophets before Christ, then in Christ, then in Mahomet, now is incarnate in Beha. They seem without any conviction of sin, they suppose themselves to be wise, not knowing their own folly & they are very self-satisfied. But they have doubtless been raised by God at this time—they divide the Mohammedan camp in Persia in two sections, thus making it easier for the Gospel to step in.[55]

Carless, in his annual letter for 1890, still regarded the presence of the Bahá'ís in Yazd as an advantage to the missionaries. Two years later, however, after a further tour of Yazd, Carless wrote of "the spreading of Babiism & its essential anti-Christian teaching." In this report he stated: "It [Babism] is spreading widely in the Mahommedan world & will contest the field with us—the rapid spread of its false teaching is a sure call to us to step in & teach the people the truth."[56]

Gradually, the other missionaries also came around to this point of view. In 1901 Rev. Napier Malcolm wrote: "I have not yet made up my mind whether the Babis are easier or more difficult to persuade than the Mussulmans. Opinions greatly differ out here. Of one thing I am sure—that directly attacking the doctrines of Beha is as absurd as trying to break a stick at the strongest point."[57]

During this time, the first anti-Bahá'í polemical tracts were published by the CMS missionaries: *Murásilát-i Díní* (Religious correspondence), 1898, *Naṣíḥat Námihy-i Muḥabbatánihy-i 'Abdu'l-Masíḥ* (A loving letter of advice from a servant of Christ), 1899, and *Rij'at-i Ḥaḍrat-i Masíḥ Ibnu'lláh* (The return of Christ the Son of God), no date. The first two were written by Mr. W. St. Clair Tisdall, and the third by Rev. Henry Carless.

In March 1917 the *Church Missionary Review* reported: "The Bahais, followers of Baha Ullah, who is supposed to have ascended from his prison at Acca, where he died, to the throne of God, are showing great activity in Persia, and within the last few years have won many converts from Islam and Zoroastrianism, while they have proved a great hindrance to the spread of Christianity.[58]

An indication of the mood of the missionaries is that at about this time they decided to find other accommodation in Najafábád than the mission house they had rented for many years from a Bahá'í.[59]

Interestingly, Rev. W. A. Rice published in 1902 a report of "A Babi Pamphlet" which was written by a Bahá'í and was a "deliberate attempt made to convert Christians to Babiism by means of arguments derived from their own Bible."[60] Although the name of the author of the pamphlet is not given, it is clear from various indications that it was Mírzá 'Alí-Ashraf-i Lahíjání, the Bahá'í poet who is better known by his pen name 'Andalíb. The work was written for the benefit of Prof. Browne whom the author met in Yazd.

Thus during the first decade of the twentieth century, relations between the Bahá'í community and the English missionaries became somewhat strained. During the second decade of that century they were eventually cut completely.

THE AMERICAN MISSIONARIES

In 1870 the Presbyterians withdrew from the ABCFM. In the partition agreement, the Mission to the Nestorians based at Urúmíyyih was transfered to their care. At about this time, the name of the mission was changed to the Mission to Persia, thus indicating that the missionaries intended to extend their work to the Muslim population. As a consequence of this, missionary stations were established in Ṭihrán (1872), Tabriz (1873), and Hamadan (1881). Later, other stations were established at Mashhad, Rasht, and Kermanshah but, by agreement, the Americans stayed out of southern Iran, which was designated the field of the CMS.

The interaction between Bahá'ís and American missionaries followed much the same course as that between Bahá'ís and CMS missionaries. However, because the Americans confined their work to the Nestorians for so many years (even when they had established their missions in other parts of the country, they still confined their activities to native Christians), there seems at first to have been little contact between the two groups. Rev.

James Bassett records meeting two Bahá'í "missionaries" in Sabzivar.[61] There were other contacts at Rasht,[62] Tabriz and Ṭihrán.[63] But the most prolonged contact was at Hamadan where the Bahá'í community, and in particular Ḥájí Mihdí, held a long series of discussions over a period of two years with Dr. G. W. Holmes, an American medical missionary.[64]

Initially, as in the south, the reaction of the missionaries was favorable. Thus in the American *Missionary Review of the World* in 1898, the following comment appears:

> There is much in the new teaching "Babism" that is sad, but it has opened the door to the Gospel as nothing else has done. Bible circulation is almost doubled every year. It is computed that in many towns and villages half the population are Babis. This is a clear indication that the people of Persia are already, in large measure, wearied with Islam, and anxious for a higher, holier, and more spiritual faith.[65]

Rev. J. N. Wright, American Presbyterian missionary in Tabriz, wrote in June 1901: "Everywhere in our field the Moslems seem in a restless state of mind, and are seeking for some remedy in a religious change. The sect of Babis are making large gains in the rural districts. All their leaders are enlightened men intellectually at least. I hope they may prepare the way for religious freedom in Persia."[66]

And Miss Grettie Y. Holliday, another American missionary in Tabriz, wrote in January 1902: "I do think that the Babis are doing a work in preparing the people for religious inquiry and their existence testifies to a longing after God and a deep dissatisfaction with Islam."[67]

Dr. Holmes echoed these sentiments when he wrote in 1904: "Nevertheless I believe that Behaism is destined to prove a solvent for Islam which will eventually assist materially in breaking down the resistance of that stubborn and unyielding system of error, itself then perishing also in the ruin it has helped to bring about. Indirectly it will thus hasten the triumph of the Cross of Christ."[68] However, in the same article Holmes states: "It will bring a few nearer to Christ. [But] by far the greater

number of its adherents will be brought into more active antagonism to Christianity than before."[69]

Rev. Dr. Potter, a missionary stationed in Ṭihrán, writing of a visit to Qazvin, mentions the initial expectations and alludes to the growing disappointment of the missionaries with Bahá'ís:

> At one time there seemed a bright prospect of reaching the Babis, but the expectation was not realized. They seem in some respects to present a more hopeful field for mission labour than the Moslems, because of their ready acceptance of the Scriptures and certain Christian doctrines rejected by the Mohammedans. On the other hand, however, their fanciful interpretation of plain Scripture declarations renders it very difficult to make any impression on them by proof texts from the Bible whose authority they readily admit.[70]

The break between Bahá'ís and American missionaries, when it came, was a dramatic and bitter affair. Several of the missionaries went into print with articles highly critical of the Bahá'ís and of Bahá'í doctrine. (See bibliography.) Most prolific of all was Rev. S. G. Wilson of the Tabriz mission who, after writing a series of articles in different periodicals, finally formulated his polemic in a book entitled *Bahaism and Its Claims*. Other articles were written by J. D. Frame and J. H. Shedd. More missionary opinions were recorded in Speer's *Missions and Modern History*. Many of these articles, and Wilson's in particular, are couched in the most acrimonious terms and reflect obvious animosity.

Matters reached the point that in 1910 there was almost a riot in Urúmíyyih. The French consul at Tabriz, A.-L.-M. Nicolas, reported:

> There is some trouble at Urúmíyyih. It began when the populace was aroused by the fact that the American missionaries have, in their school, as a teacher of Persian, a Bahá'í named Lisán-Ḥuḍúr. This Bahá'í made use of his position to convert all of his pupils to Bahaism, which offended the Americans, who dismissed their teacher and will even go to the extent of asking for his expulsion from the town. The American consul has left for this town.[71]

It is clear that there was a great difference between the relations of the British CMS in the south, and the American Presbyterians in the north, with their respective Bahá'í communities. The break in the south was free of the bitterness and vituperation that characterized the break in the north. Indeed, it is noticeable that the only article to appear in the CMS's *Church Missionary Review* that could be regarded as anti-Bahá'í polemic was written by the American, Rev. S. G. Wilson. None of the British missionaries took such an attitude until the 1930s when Rev. J. R. Richards of the CMS began to publish material directed against the Bahá'ís.

We might at this point attempt an assessment of the relations between Bahá'ís and missionaries from the Bahá'í point of view. The writings of the missionaries on numerous occasions suggest that there was a concerted plan by Bahá'ís to infiltrate the missions and win over those who attended them.[72] None of the Bahá'í histories which I have consulted makes any reference to Bahá'í proselytizing activity, whether planned or otherwise, in the mission stations. What is clear, however, (even from the reports of the missionaries,)[73] is that the Bahá'í Faith was expanding so rapidly at this time in Persia that the Bahá'í activity reported in the missions is insignificant when compared to what was going on elsewhere. Mission-related conversions to the Bahá'í Faith were probably merely a reflection of that larger, widespread growth. What the missionaries failed to realize was that it is the religious obligation of every Bahá'í to propagate his religion actively.[74] Thus if a Bahá'í were employed at a mission station (and even Wilson tells us that his own secretary was a Bahá'í),[75] he would endeavor to proselytize in that situation.

GERMAN MISSIONARIES

In Andreas's *Die Babis in Persien,* there is a brief note concerning a German missionary effort that seems to have been directed principally at the Bahá'ís. I have not been able to find any other references to this work, but Andreas's account is worthy of note since it paints a valuable picture of Bahá'í community life in Iran just before the turn of the century:

On 8 March 1895 Pastor Christian Közle died at Urúmíyyih in northern Persia. This outstandingly gifted young German theologian had made it his special task to bring the Bábís nearer to Christianity. He enjoyed a sincere friendship with many Bábís. An outstanding teacher of the Bábís described to him the following three propositions as the guidelines of life for the Bábís:

(1) We consider everyone as our brother and love our enemies too, as the sun shines on the evil and the truth;

(2) Like the prophets and Jesus, we must endure much suffering in order to lead men to the truth;

(3) We pray to God that He may let His kingdom come and make all men his sons.

Concerning the form of service used by the Bábís, Közle made the following observations, based on the information of an outstanding Bábí, on a small sheet of paper which is in my possession:

The procedure at Bábí meetings: (1) reading from the "Bajan akdas" [*Bayán-i Aqdas*?, presumably the Kitáb-i Aqdas]; (2) sermon by a "Peirember" [presumably, *Payámbar*, messenger]; (3) questions to the "Peirember" by the individual attenders of the meeting and his answers (time: 1 to 3 hours).

At the beginning and end of the meetings a Bábí who has a good voice sings.

There are special meetings for women, which follow the same course as those for the men.

The Bábís set great store by the education of the children, as much for the girls as for the boys.

The main meetings of the Bábís take place on the last day of each month. They have a year of nineteen months, each month has nineteen days.

Közle intended to establish schools for the Bábís in which systematic Christian religious teaching was to be given. This idea was received by the Bábís with great joy. Közle's death stopped it being carried out.

The contact that I started in 1892, with influential Bábís, and which Dr. Zerweck and Paster Közle intended to carry on, was the main reason given by the Persian government to the German foreign office for the expulsion of German missionaries in February 1895.

In the eyes of the Persian government the Bábís were, and are, dangerous revolutionaries, whom it is trying to wipe out by fire and

the sword. But they are in fact the pioneers of truth, freedom, and justice in the dark country of Persia, and have shown a courage in self-sacrifice and a joy in martyrdom rarely seen in the world's history. Were the new Sháh Muẓaffaru'd-Dín to give the Bábís freedom of religion, he would be conferring the greatest benefit on his country.[76]

MISSIONARIES IN PALESTINE AND SYRIA

Bahá'u'lláh and his companions came across Christian missionaries on several occasion during their exile. The contacts with Revs. Leon Rosenberg and J. N. Ball at Adrianople in 1867, and with Dr. Thomas Chaplin and Revs. Frederick Smith, James Jacob Huber, John Zeller, and James Neil in 'Akká from 1871 to 1874 are described elsewhere.[77] It is of interest that the pattern which has been noted above for Persia—that of initial delight and enthusiasm, turning later to disappointment and a varying degree of antagonism—was repeated to some extent in Palestine, in earlier encounters as well as in later ones.

Prior to 1890, the CMS had maintained a school in 'Akká run by a native teacher, but in this year Miss Elizabeth Wardlaw-Ramsay was appointed to open a missionary station there. In January 1891 she was joined by Miss S. Louis Barker, and in November 1891 by Miss Catherine C. Coote. These ladies were soon in contact with the Bahá'ís. In October 1891 they visited Bahjí, where Bahá'u'lláh was living:

> The end of October we were taken by a Native lady to visit the harem of the leader of a strange sect who has a large place about half an hour's walk from Acca, and a smaller house in the town. The ladies were most warm in their reception . . . many came to see us. On our leaving they gave us flowers, and entreated us to come again—indeed they wanted us every day. . . . This is indeed an open door, and I hope that, now we have a Bible-woman, they will often be visited.[78]

The lady missionaries were much encouraged by their contact with the Bahá'ís. When Bruce's Persian translation of the Gospel was published, twenty copies were ordered by the secretary of

the Palestine Mission in February 1892, with the following instructions: "To be sent direct from Beyrout to Miss Wardlaw Ramsay, Acre, for the use of a 'half Moslem, half Christian' sect of Persian immigrants who have settled in Haifa."[79]

Nearby in Beirut, the American missionaries of the Presbyterian ABCFM had their headquarters. It was one of these missionaries, Rev. Henry H. Jessup, who made a most favorable reference to Bahá'u'lláh at the World's Parliament of Religions in Chicago, in 1893—a reference which is given prominence by Bahá'ís as the first public mention to their religion in America:

> In the palace of Behjeh . . . just outside the fortress of Acre, . . . there died a few months since a famous Persian sage, the Babi saint, named Behâ Allah . . . the head of that vast reform party of Persian Moslems, who accept the New Testament as the Word of God and Christ as the deliverer of men, who regard all nations as one, and all men as brothers. Three years ago he was visited by a Cambridge scholar, and gave utterances [*sic*] to sentiments so noble, so Christ-like. . .[80]

By 1894, however, friction arose between the missionaries and the Bahá'ís. Between 1894 and 1896, reports were given to the missionaries by various individuals, who are not named, that 'Abdu'l-Bahá had "forbidden them [his followers] to receive the Miss Ramsays in their houses or to go to the mission house."[81] And even: "Five men of the Persians fled last year, because they were suspected of wishing to become Christians and were threatened with death."[82]

In view of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's widely acclaimed tolerance and freedom from bigotry, these reports seem out of character, especially since at this time 'Abdu'l-Bahá was encouraging an expansion of the Faith in the West. Certainly 'Abdu'l-Bahá's later contacts with the same group of missionaries were amicable enough. In 1895, for example, the CMS established a medical mission in 'Akká which occupied part of the mansion of 'Abdu'lláh Páshá adjacent to that rented by 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Dr. Cropper, who was in charge of the mission, reported in 1897: "The head of the Persians, Abbas Effendi, who occupies the

house adjoining this, has done all he can to make the place pleasant and tidy, and we have had no annoyance whatever from his followers who constantly pass the door of the dispensary."[83]

In the CMS medical missionary report for 1902–03, 'Abdu'l-Bahá is reported to have given a Napoleon to the hospital work on one occasion.[84] Later still, in 1910, Dr. Coles, who was in charge of the Haifa Hospital of the Jerusalem and East Mission, described 'Abdu'l-Bahá as a "venerable and amiable leader" and went on to say, "He is most friendly and the moral influence of his teaching has an elevating effect on those with whom he comes into contact."[85] And Rev. S. B. Rohold of the Haifa Mission of the British CMJ referred to 'Abdu'l-Bahá as "my dear friend."[86]

Thus those earlier hostile references by the missionaries in the period 1894–96 are puzzling, particularly since the missionaries do not provide any names to help us clarify the situation. The only circumstance in which 'Abdu'l-Bahá was wont to use severity and firmness was in dealings with those Bahá'ís who in his view were seeking to destroy the unity of the Bahá'í community, the "Covenant-breakers." There was indeed at this time just such a move afoot in 'Akká in the form of Mírzá Muḥammad-'Alí's opposition to 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Matters developed to the point that for a time, in 1896, 'Abdu'l-Bahá was compelled to withdraw from 'Akká to Tiberias. We know from the confession published by his brother, Mirzá Badí'u'lláh, that at this time Mírzá Muḥammad-'Alí was spreading false accusations against 'Abdu'l-Bahá to various persons, including the governor of Syria.[87] It is possible that the accusations which reached the missionaries were part of this campaign of Mírzá Muḥammad-'Alí.

In any case, after the turn of the century the missionaries' reports contained no further talk of converting the Bahá'ís in Haifa and 'Akká. And Jessup, whose earlier sympathetic reference to Bahá'u'lláh has been noted above, now began to write hostile accounts of the Bahá'ís. The following passage from his *Fifty-Three Years in Syria* is an example:

> The book you speak of as "Bab el Din", Revelation from the East is . . . some new rehash of Professor Browne of Cambridge, England, on the "Episode of the Bab," the Persian delusion whose head man, Beha-ullah in Acre claimed to be an incarnation of God and on his death a few years ago his son, Abbas Effendi, succeeded him and is running the "incarnation" fraud for all that it is worth, and that is worth a good deal, as pilgrims constantly come from the Babite sect in Persia and bring their offerings of money with great liberality.[88]

CONCLUSION

There is not a great deal more to be said about the relationships between Christian missionaries and Bahá'ís in the Middle East. Although individual missionaries such as Dr. Carr in Shiraz and Dr. Edwin E. Bliss of Beirut maintained amicable relations with the Bahá'ís, the two communities severed their ties in the first two decades of the twentieth century, and references to the Bahá'ís almost disappear in the reports of the missionaries. During this same period, the rise of the Bahá'í community in North America and in Europe, and particularly 'Abdu'l-Bahá's tours in that part of the world, resulted in a shift of the principal arena of Bahá'í-Christian polemic to the West. But even here, it was missionaries with experience in Iran and the Middle East who were in the forefront of the debate, and who continue to be so to the present day.

NOTES

1. See, for example, Waterfield, *Christians in Persia*.
2. Waterfield, *Christians in Persia*, p. 103.
3. A few other missionary groups were active in Persia during this time, but these were of no significance. The British and Foreign Bible Society contributed to Bruce's mission in Julfa. The Edinburgh Missionary Society and the Basel Missionary Society were active in the Caucasus. The former society converted Mírzá Kazem-Beg, who was to be one of the earliest scholars to study the Bábí religion.
4. Phelps, *Life and Teachings*, pp. xv–xvi.
5. Curzon, *Persia*, vol. 1, p. 508.

6. Wright, *English Among the Persians*, p. 199.

7. Pfeiffer, *Woman's Journey*, pp. 286–88.

8. In his *Christians in Persia*, p. 113, Waterfield states that in Shiraz Stern and Sternschuss found "that there were about 350 Jewish families, 25 or 30 of which had become Babis." But, it was not until decades later, during the ministry of Bahá'u'lláh, that Jews entered the religion of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh. Balyuzi has clearly demonstrated, based on statements made in Ḥájí Mírzá Habíbu'lláh's chronicle history (see *The Báb*, p. 103), that during this period the Bábí community in Shiraz consisted of a handful of persons from Muslim backgrounds. This incorrect statement of Waterfield's is probably based on a report from Sternschuss which stated, with respect to Shiraz, that: "The Jewish population is calculated at about 350 families. There are about 25 or 30 families who have apostatized, and who profess in the pseudo-prophet." (*Jewish Intelligence*, May 1846, p. 157). In view of what we know of the Bábí community of Shiraz at this time, it would seem probable that by "pseudo-prophet" Sternschuss meant Muḥammad.

9. Layard, *Early Adventures*, pp. 114–17, 220–23, 258–60, 284, 342.

10. Stern, *Dawnings of Light*, p. 157.

11. Ibid., pp. 160–61.

12. *Jewish Intelligence*, August 1847, p. 294.

13. Stern, *Dawnings of Light*, pp. 161–62, 169.

14. Ibid., pp. 261–62.

15. According to the *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 4 (1854) p. xxiii, they read at their meeting of 18–19 May 1853 a paper by Wright entitled "A Short Chapter in the History of Babeeism in Persia," but they did not publish this. It is not clear whether this is the same paper that was translated in the *Zeitschrift* (see below) or another, later, paper submitted by Wright.

16. Wright, "Bab und seine Secte," pp. 384–85.

17. Ibid., p. 385.

18. In the spring of 1972, Mme. Paullette Bodansen and I searched the archives at the headquarters of the Lazarists (95, rue de Sevres, Paris) for the period 1848 to 1850, during which time the Báb was being held at Chihríq, a few miles away. There were only vague references to disturbances in the area.

19. File CM/0 42(a), letter no. 96, 11 April 1870, CMS Archives, London.

20. Ibid., and also letter no. 107, 15 March 1871, CMS Archives.
21. File CI 1/0 61, letter no. 104, 3 April 1871, CMS Archives.
22. Ibid., letter no. 229, 29 September 1871.
23. Ibid.
24. Ibid., letter no. 144, 10 June 1871.
25. Ibid.
26. Ibid., letter no. 177, 20 July 1871.
27. File CI 1/0 59 a, letter no. 174, 31 July 1873, CMS Archives.
28. File CI 1/0 61, letter no. 23 a, 4 September 1874, CMS Archives.
29. File CM/0 42, letter no. 118, 28 September 1871, CMS Archives.
30. Ibid., letter no. 107, 15 February 1871.
31. ibid. letter no. 187, 3 May 1876.
32. Browne and Nicholson, *Descriptive Catalogue*, p. 81.
33. Khán to Browne, 23 March 1912, in private hands.
34. Bámdád, *Táríkh-i Rijál-i Írán*, vol. 6, p. 291. Both Mírzá Hadí and Mírza 'Abdu'l-Kháliq were, of course, from the Isfahan area.
35. File CI 1/0 61, letter no. 104, 2 April 1871, CMS Archives.
36. See pp. 63, below.
37. *Man Yuẓhiru'lláh*: the Báb makes frequent reference to the advent of another great prophetic figure whom he denotes by this expression.
38. Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p. 126.
39. In his dissertation to Prof. Browne, Siyyid Mihdíy-i Dahají mentions going to meet some of the Kullu-Shay'ís in Yazd. He found them to be ignorant men. One of these is also mentioned as being named Ismá'íl-i Sabbágh, but it is doubtful that this is the same man mentioned above. Manuscript F57, Browne Collection, Cambridge University Library, p. 179.
40. Momen, *Bábí and Bahá'í Religions*, pp. 269–73.
41. File CI 1/0 61, letter no. 12, 19 November 1874, CMS Archives.
42. File C/PE/01, letter no. 91, 28 December 1877, CMS Archives.
43. *Intelligencer*, July 1893, pp. 512–16.
44. Stuart had expressed similar opinions about other towns previously. In Yazd, in 1896, he had written: "There can be no doubt that a spirit of great inquiry pervades Yazd, the result, I believe of the spread of Babiism among all ranks." File G2/PE/0/1896, letter no. 86, CMS Archives.
45. CMS, *Annual Letters, 1898*, p. 6 of supplement.
46. File C/PE/01, letter no. 34, 3 October 1876, CMS Archives.

47. *Bible Society Monthly Reporter*, April 1887, pp. 55–56.
48. Preece to Kennedy, 6 January 1871, FO 248 535, Public Record Office.
49. Momen, *Bábí and Bahá'í Religions*, p. 270–72.
50. Ibid.
51. File G2/PE 0/1890, letter no. 43, 17 April 1890, CMS Archives. Quoted in *Jewish Intelligence*, August 1890, p. 126.
52. Momen, *Bábí and Bahá'í Religions*, pp. 368, 389, 394, 395.
53. Bax Ironside to Wolff, n.d. (c. March 1890), FO 248 514, Public Record Office.
54. File G2/PE 0/1893, letter no. 105, 11 August 1893, CMS Archives.
55. File G2/PE 0/1890, letter no. 75, 1 July 1890, CMS Archives.
56. File G2/PE 0/1892, letter no. 65, 16 July 1892, CMS Archives.
57. File G2/PE 0/1901, letter no. 92, 19 April 1901, CMS Archives.
58. *Church Missionary Review*, March 1917, p. 157.
59. File G2/PE 0/1917, letter from W. A. Rice, 7 November 1917, CMS Archives.
60. *Intelligencer*, August 1902, pp. 564–73.
61. Bassett, *Persia*, p. 214.
62. 'Amídu'l-Aṭibbá's manuscript history, "Táríkh-i Rasht" (pp. 34–36), contains an account of a public discussion between the American missionary, Dr. Schuler, and the Bahá'ís of Rasht.
63. Accounts of contacts throughout north and west Persia may be found in Speer, *Missions*, vol. 1, pp. 121–68.
64. Sulaymání, *Masabíḥy-i Hidáyat*, vol. 4, pp. 461–62.
65. *Missionary Review of the World*, vol. 11 (January 1898) p. 55.
66. Speer, *Missions*, p. 155.
67. Ibid., p. 155n.
68. Ibid., p. 171.
69. Ibid., p. 170.
70. ibid., p. 162.
71. Correspondence politique, Consultat de Tauris, 1910–11, N–VII, pp. 59–60.
72. See, for example, Wilson, *Bahaism*, pp. 199–200; Richards, *Religion of the Baha'is*, pp. 208–209.
73. *Church Missionary Review*, March 1917, p. 157; and Wright, cited in Speer, *Missions*, vol. 1, p. 155.
74. There are many statements of Bahá'u'lláh in this vein, for example: "Say: Teach ye the Cause of God, O people of Bahá, for God hath prescribed unto every one the duty of proclaiming his Message, and

regardeth it as the most meritorious of all deeds." *Gleanings*, p. 277. This is notwithstanding the fact that at this period there existed a number of Bahá'ís called *muballighín* (teachers) who specialized in propagation of the religion.

75. *Methods of Mission Work*, p. 184.
76. Andreas, *Die Babis*, pp. 67–68.
77. See Momen, *Bábí and Bahá'í Religions*, pp. 187–97, 205–207, 209–219.
78. Annual letter of Miss S. L. Barker, December 1891. Quoted in *Church Missionary Gleaner*, May 1892, p. 74.
79. Letter from Charles Gibbern of Eastbourne, 25 February 1892, File G2/PE 0/1892; letter no. 16, 25 February 1892, CMS Archives.
80. Jessup, in *World's Parliament of Religions*, vol. 2, pp. 1125–26.
81. Account by Langley-Hall of a journey to Nablus, Nazareth, Haifa, and 'Akká, February 1896 G3/P 09/18952, CMS Archives.
82. Miss Wardlaw-Ramsay's Report to Ladies Conference of CMS in Jerusalem, 21 March 1896, File G3/P/0 9/1895b, CMS Archives.
83. Report of Medical Missions at 'Akká for first quarter of 1897. File G3 P/0 10/1897a, CMS Archives.
84. *Preaching and Healing*, 1902–3, p. 38.
85. *Annual Report of Jerusalem and East Mission for 1910*, p. 17.
86. *Jewish Missionary Herald*, February 1922, p. 13.
87. Badí'u'lláh, *Epistle*, pp. 17–18.
88. Jessup, *Fifty-Three Years*, vol. 2, pp. 636–37.